

Archaeology in Connecticut

Evidence of human fishing in North America appears on Native American archaeology sites as early as the Paleo-Indian period, ca. 10,000 years before present.

By the Middle Archaic (8,000 – 6,000 ybp), Native American camp sites appear in Connecticut and elsewhere across New England at major fall lines and other strategic fishing locations along waterways where spring runs of anadromous fish could be exploited more easily. Because of the continual rise in sea level since the retreat of the glaciers, shellfish collection sites prior to the Late Archaic are likely located beneath the waters of Long Island Sound.

Prior to European contact, the annual settlement pattern consisted of two or more base camps surrounded by myriad of smaller camps that were occupied at various times of the year by some or all of the community members for differing lengths of time. These included hunting camps and game lookout stations; nut and other plant collecting and processing camps; maple-sugaring camps; berry collecting camps; stone quarries and workshops for collecting raw material and making stone tools; tree-processing camps for canoe manufacture or bowl and wood splint basket-making; fish camps and shell middens; burying grounds and other sacred sites, to name but a few.

Species of fish available to aboriginal inhabitants of Southern New England were: shad, salmon, alewife, herring, eel, sturgeon, bass, trout, perch, mackerel, pickerel, suckers and bullhead.

Eels are found in virtually every river and stream in eastern North America and their high caloric content makes them the most nutritious of the food fish.

Beside spears and hooks, weirs contributed substantial amounts of fish. Nets made of Indian hemp (dogbane) and other fibers were another device that permitted large catches of fish. Stones were notched, grooved and perforated for attachment to nets.

Connecticut has approximately 450,000 acres of wetlands, 6,000 miles of streams and rivers, over 2,000 lakes and reservoirs and 600 square miles of estuarine water on Long Island Sound. These waterways are ideal environments for finfish and shellfish nurseries and habitats, and they provided Native American communities with access to a variety of shellfish (oyster, scallop, quahog, softshell clam, whelk, mussel and others), crustaceans (crabs, lobster), deep sea finfish and marine mammals (seal, whale), all of which have been found at coastal shell midden sites.

Soapstone (steatite) was used for making cooking vessels from approximately 3,650 – 2,700 ypb, (Terminal Archaic).

These notes are from *Connecticut's First Fishermen*, the LeBeau Fishing Camp and Weir State Archaeological Preserve, Killingly, Connecticut, 2008.